

Pulling Away by orphan_account

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Aged Up, Angst, Art School, College, Comedy, F/M, Fluff, Gay Will Byers, Jealous Mike Wheeler, Long-Distance Friendship, M/M, Mike Wheeler Being an Idiot, Mike is awkward, Multi, Oblivious Mike, Oblivious Will, Pansexual Character, Pansexual Mike Wheeler, Protective Mike Wheeler, Tech school, The party is going to college/university, Will Byers is an angel, Will is a shy bean, Will is an anxious boi, but never actually confirmed, college students, implied/referenced depression, its a little bit of everything tbh, the upsidedown is still a thing that happened though

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jane Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Ted Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

[CURRENTLY ONHIATUS]

Mike had never thought a lot about his future; he was more of an in the moment kinda guy. But suddenly it was time for the party to separate, find their own places in the world and go to university. It seemed everyone had decided on what they wanted. Everyone except Mike.

Basically, Michael Wheeler struggles with the feeling of being left behind and figuring out what he wants to do with his life. He

struggles even more with the sudden and crushing lack of William Byers in his life .

Warnings: Hinted depression but never confirmed, mentions of anxiety, possibly more in later chapters?

(Me? Pushing my own problems onto Mike?? It's more likely than you think!)

1. Goodbyes

Author's Note:

Hello! So, this is my first fic in AWHILE it's also my first fic for Mike and Will! I've had a bad case of writers block and so Im kinda using this to work my way out of it. But I AM still gonna put all my effort into it bc these are my children and Mike and Will are so soft and pure <3 Anyways, I hope you enjoy:)

Note: All characters are 18-19

Mike laid on Will's bed starring up at the ceiling as Will cluttered around, throwing some things into his suitcase but most into bins for donation. His room eerily bare.

"Mike I thought you said you were coming to *help*."

"I was, but then I realized I don't want you to go so I cant help."

Will chuckled and Mike sat up so that he could see the smile that tugged at his friends lips.

Will came over placing another shirt in his suitcase and Mike pulled it out. Will paused and starred at him for a moment before putting it back in, only for Mike to pull it out a second later.

"Mike."

"Will."

"You're ridiculous."

"You're ridiculous."

Will sighed and went back to his dresser pulling out a couple of

sketchbooks, placing them in his suitcase as well.

"I didn't know you had more than one sketchbook."

Will shrugged and Mike picked one of them up curiously. "I only ever brought one to school. I used the others for drawings I didn't want others to look at."

"Can I look?"

"Sure... just not the one with the Yoda sticker on it."

"What? Why? Now I just wanna look more!"

"Too bad! ...please don't."

"Man, you've sure gotten tougher over the years Byers."

"Hey!" Will giggled, Mike grinned his way.

Mike then proceeded to dump the entire suitcase on the floor, making sure to have removed the sketchbooks so he wouldn't cause any damage.

"Mike! C'mon! I have to be ready to leave by five am if I wanna get there in time!"

"Do you really...?" Mike asked, the teasing voice he'd been using earlier gone. A sad and serious tone taking its place.

"Mike..." Will's voice was quiet as he walked over to his friend. Standing in front of Mike but still not much taller than the sitting boy. Will hadn't grown an inch since grade 9, leaving him at 5'4. Meanwhile Mike had gone through many growth spurts, landing him at 6" He found Will's height endearing. "I have to do this. It's been my dream since-

"Elementary. I know."

It was quiet for a moment before Mike picked up an article of clothing he'd dumped on the floor and handed it to Will. A shaky smirk on his face.

"So... Art school huh? Heard only the best of the best get in."

Will gave Mike a soft smile and took the clothing from him, their hands lightly brushing."

"I'm gonna miss you Mike."

Mike swallowed around the lump in his throat. "I'm gonna miss you too Will."

"But- But it's not like we're never gonna see each other again; I'll come visit whenever I can and I'll call you all the time. "

"I know." Mike murmured, pulling Will closer. "I know."

Will sat next to Mike on the bed, resting his head on Mike's shoulder.

"I thought you had to pack?"

"I do. It can wait."

Mike smiled slightly and buried his face into Will's hair.

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Saying goodbye to everyone had been hard, but Will's leaves Mike with a heavy weight in his heart that he had never felt with the others.

The first who had headed off was Dustin, his excited and hyper nature making it hard to remember that he was going to a fancy tech school ten hours away from Hawkins.

Next had been Lucas and Max. Their university was only an hour away, where Lucas was taking a science degree hoping to major in physics. Max going into the justice system. Although it was close they still decided to live on res, Max wanting to get away from her toxic

family and Lucas of course followed after her.

Mike had never been close to Max but they had become friends. It was hard to say goodbye to Lucas. They'd been neighbours for years and now every time he saw the Sinclair house it would feel strange.

And now, last to go was Will. The only people left to wish him goodbye being Mike and Eleven.

Joyce was a sobbing mess, scared to let Will go off on his own yet proud. So, so proud. Jonathan had left two days earlier to get there in time to still have a day of relaxing before classes started, not being there to see Will off. Will acted like it wasn't a big deal but Mike could tell that Will had really wanted Jonathan here for this.

Will and Eleven hugged, their goodbyes fairly quick but still sweet and Mike wondered how Eleven wasn't in tears at the prospect of *Will Byers* leaving.

Finally it was Mike's turn and he fought to keep his tears in check for Will's sake.

"Have fun Will."

"I will." He replied with a small smile.

"Don't forget me when you get to that big fancy art school." Mike said, going for joking but just sounding sad.

Will took Mike's hand and squeezed his fingers. "Of course I wont."

Mike sniffled but managed to put a smile on his face. He threw a shoulder over Will and led him to his packed and ready vehicle.

Once Will was in the car he hesitated before starting it, turning to towards Mike.

"Mike, I'm scared..."

Mike wanted to reply with *'I'm scared too, I'm scared you'll forget me, I'm scared you'll love it and never come back.'* But instead he took a deep breath, stepping up in his friends time of need. Lord only knows

how many times Will had done the same for him and the rest of the party.

"Don't be. You're gonna knock em dead Byers. Next time I see you you'll be like the schools next Michaelangelo."

"You only know he's an artist because of the ninja turtles, don't you?"

"Yeah." Mike said with a grin.

Will snorted and shook his head fondly. "I'll call you as soon as I get there."

"You'd better! No calling anyone else first, not even your mum!"

"Hey!" Joyce called out, having heard the comment.

Will gave Mike another smile, eyes soft and sending a warm feeling through Mike's being. "Bye Mike."

"See ya Will."

## 2. Company

### Notes for the Chapter:

Hey! I'm back, I hope you enjoy this chapter <3

“When are you going to get a job?”

Mike rolled his eyes as his parents yet again nagged him over dinner.

“You said you were taking a gap year to make some money and ‘find yourself’ and you just lay around doing nothing in the basement all day long.”

“I’m not gonna find myself working at some stupid grocery store.” Mike muttered. To an extent he agreed with his parents, yet he was too tired to be bothered.

“You’ve been in that basement for eighteen years and didn’t find anything there either.”

Mike sighed and pushed his untouched plate away from him.

“You know what’s wrong with kids nowadays?” Ted asked, his mouth full of food as he waved his fork at Mike. “They’re privileged. They think they can just do whatever they want. You think laying around and complaining is suddenly gonna bring you your dream life on a silver platter?”



Mike dropped his chin into his hands and stifled a groan of boredom.

“I blame all those videogames. They make kids so lazy. Back in my day-”

Mike tuned his father out, wondering not for the first time today, why he even bothered with getting out of bed.

Some time while Mike was lost in thought his father had stopped talking and had made his way into the living room, turning on the tv. Mike took the chance to get up and leave, grabbing his plate when his mother interrupted him.

“Honey are you done? You didn’t even touch your food.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“But it’s lasagna, your favourite.”

“I’ll have some later.”

“Alright then...”

Mike made his way downstairs, his legs feeling like led and he fell onto the couch. Through the walls Mike was still able to hear his parents.

“Ted, I think there’s something wrong with Mike.”

“You worry too much like I said earlier, he’s taken his freedom and wasting it being lazy.”

“He’s been like this for the past couple weeks.”

“You know what you need to do? You need to stop doing everything for him. He’ll come to his senses soon enough.”

“When I was at the doctors the other day. I saw a pamphlet on Depression, I read through it and I thought-”

“Oh Lord, Enough with that bullshit. That’s just something doctors make up so they can get more money from you. Life can be hard, he needs to get over it.”

“Shouldn’t we *try* to be understanding, all of his friends are off at school. He’s probably feeling lonely.”

“We’ve been understanding and it’s not working. That kid needs to be pushed. It’s just like when he was younger and that Byers boy went missing. He acted out, we started getting stricter and he shapped up.”

Karen begrudgingly agreed before wandering back into the kitchen. Mike sighed, had it really only been two weeks without Will around?

The phone next to Mike's head started to ring and it caused him to jump but he still didn't make a move to grab it, assuming his mother would pick it up anyways. He was correct and shortly after she answered he could hear her running to the top of the basement steps.

"Mike!"

"Hm?"

"It's Will on the line!"

Mike instantly perked up, "I'll use the phone down here, you can hang up!"

His mother nodded and left, closing the door behind her.

"Will?!"

"Hey Mike!"

A smile spread across Mike's face, "It's been ages!"

"I called you three days ago."

“Like I said, ages!”

Will chuckled and it sent a jolt of electricity down Mike’s spine. “Sorry, I had a big assignment and wanted to get a headstart, I take it nothing exciting is going on in Hawkins.”

“Hawkins is the most boring place on the planet.”

Will laughed again and Mike’s smile was so wide it was surprising his skin hadn’t split in two.

“Well I have a long weekend starting Friday, so if you want we could do something! I could come to Hawkins-”

“I’ll come to you! There’s nothing going on here, besides I wanna get to see your big fancy art school.”

Mike could tell that Will would be blushing at that comment, and when he spoke Mike could hear it in his voice as well. “It’s *amazing* Mike! I mean, I expected it to be great but this is... it’s way more than I imagined.”

“I’m glad.” Mike replied, and honestly he was. Will sounded so excited that it spread through the phone and into Mike as well.

“Me too.” Will said with a happy sigh.

“How’s your dormmate? You didn’t get stuck with a crazy person did you? You haven’t said much about them...”

“Oh it’s nothing like that! They just weren’t around much at first but he’s really hilarious! Once you get used to his sense of humour that is. We get along great!”

“Don’t go replacing me, ya got that?”

Will laughed, “Mike, I’d never dream of it”

“Good.”

After that Will continued to tell Mike about some of his classeThe next morning Mike pulled himself out of bed and to the shower, putting on his last pair of clean clothes.

When he entered the kitchen his mum gave him a surprised look.  
“Mike? You’re out of bed?”

“Um yeah?”

“Great! Great! Do you want some breakfast?”

“Not hungry. When you’re done with the laundry hamper I need it.”

“You’re washing your clothes, you’re showered and out of bed by what’s suddenly got you so happy and energetic? Or should I say who?” His mother asked with a knowing smile.

Mike couldn’t help but smile as well, getting happy just thinking about seeing Will again. “On Thursday night I’m driving up to Will’s campus. He’s got a long weekend so we’re gonna spend it together.”

“Oh that’s wonderful! I’m glad you’re up and about. Anyways, I’ve got errands to run, the laundry should be done in twenty minutes and then you can put your things in.”

After Mike finished up his laundry he flopped, the simple task having drained him completely.

Three days and he was going to see Will.

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It wasn’t until Wednesday that he actually left the house, hoping to catch Eleven leaving school. Kuckily he made it in time, but when she saw Mike she gave him a look and kept walking. Mike sighed and jogged over to her.

“Hey El.”

Eleven didn't respond.

“”El c'mon, I know I was being a bad friend. I'm sorry.”

“You havent spoken to me since Will left.” Eleven spat, continuing to walk.

“I know, I know, I was having a hard time with it and I'm super, super sorry. Really I am!”

Eleven slowed down and muttered, “I told you to call me Jane on schoolgrounds.”

“Right. Sorry.”

“Coming to my place?”

“Is Hopper gonna let me in?”

Eleven smiled and rolled her eyes. “He doesn't hate you Mike.”

“Is that because he actually likes me or because we aren’t together anymore?”

“Little bit of both.”

Mike laughed, he had missed Eleven’s company.

“I’m really sorry El, I love spending time with you and it wasn’t fair of me to just disappear like that.”

“I’ve missed you Mike.” Mike gave Eleven a wet kiss on the cheek and she batted him away. Mike definitely believed that he and Eleven were platonic soulmates, and he knew she felt the same.

“I’m going to see Will tomorrow.”

Eleven gave Mike a soft smile, everyone knew she had quite the soft spot for Will, but really everyone who got to know Will did.

“Tell him I say hello.”

“Will do.”

“Are you gonna bring him something?”

“Hey that’s a good idea! I should bring him some of my mum’s cooking, I doubt he’s been eating well...”

“I meant something romantic.”

“Romantic? I- uh- why would I-”

“Mike please.” Eleven scoffed.

Mike sighed, “Since when have you known?”

“Since you were in Grade nine. How long have *you* known?”

“End of Grade ten is when I started to realize it.”

It was quiet for a moment before Mike stopped walking. “Wait. Grade *nine?!?*”

“Yep.”

“You could have given me a nudge in the right direction!”

“Would it have made a difference? You’ve known for three years and you still haven’t done anything.”

“Look, it’s complicated.”

“Oh boy-”

“It is! I love what we have right now, I don’t wanna ruin that. What if he doesn’t feel the same? He’d still be my best friend but I’d make it awkward.”

“Mike, It’s *Will* .”

“Fine, then lets say he did feel the same, we start dating everything’s going good. He goes off to college his option of guys to like isnt just-like three- anymore and suddenly I don’t seem so good anymore and he completely forgets about me!”

“You are unbelievable, this is Will Byers we’re talking about. Your best friend who’s been basically attached to you since Kindergarden. He’d never leave you.”

“That... That might be worse. I’d have to see him with somebody else for the rest of my life.”

“Well what if he feels just as crazy about you as you do about him. But he eventually gets tired of waiting for you and forces himself to

move on.”

Mike groaned “Okay, okay, I’ll get him something.... Should I get him the new addition of Star-”

“No.”

“I didn’t even-”

“Something *romantic* Mike.”

“But Will would *like*-”

“*Romantic.*”

Mike huffed in annoyance, “Fine. Something romantic.”

Eleven gave him a pleased smile and patted him on the shoulder.
“Good.”

On his way to Will’s he stopped in at Hawkin’s flower shop and picked out some flowers he thought would be good for Will. And then began his journey.

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you for reading! I always appreciate constructive criticism and opinions! If you wanna talk about these soft bois feel free to hmu on instagram @lonely_ghoul :) Hope you have a nice day!

-Mei

3. Iris'

Summary for the Chapter:

Mike and Will spend time together for the first time since Will's gone to university and Mike realizes just how little the distance changes between them

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry this took awhile but I've been p busy at school, everything been getting piled up right before winter break.

When Mike arrived at the campus his eyes widened. Will had told him it was a fancy school but he hadn't told him *just how fancy it was*.

Mike had always assumed it was a much larger accomplishment to be accepted than Will had but it still shocked him. The only uni Mike had ever seen was the one that Lucas and Max were attending, and although it was beautiful, it failed to compare to the large school he stood in front of now. Stunning, just like Will.

Mike didn't admire for too long, knowing Will would want to show him around and also desperately craving to see his best friends smile once again. He soon found himself in front of Will's dorm room. If he had jogged the whole way there, well, nobody needed to know.

Almost instantly after Mike's knuckles hit the door it was flying open and Mike was met with a facefull of Will Byers.

"Mike!" Will practically leaped at him, wrapping his arms around Mike's chest. If it weren't for Will's light weight Mike definitely would have been toppled over by the sheer force behind Will's

enthusiastic hug. Mike hugged back just as tightly, his face dusted a light pink with happiness, trying his best to be careful of the flowers that were still in his hand.

When they pulled apart both boys wore wide smiles. Mike was transfixed by the beautiful face he had missed so much these past few weeks. Calling and writing letters just wasn't the same as seeing Will face to face.

"Come in, come in, my roommate said he'd stay with a friend this weekend! Wasn't that nice of him?"

"Yeah..." Mike said with a nervous smile. He looked down at the flowers in his hand and then back up at Will, who was facing away from him, tidying something up on his desk. "H-Here."

Will turned around and Mike held out the flowers to him. Will's eyes lighting up as he saw them.

"They're Iris'... The uh- The lady at the flower shop said they're supposed to- to offer creative inspiration or something."

Will gently took them from Mike's shaking hands.

"I thought they'd be good. Y;know, considering where you are right now..." Mike said, trying his best to seem casual.

Will laughed and gave Mike a fond smile. “Thanks Mike, I love them.”

Mike grinned, “I’m glad.”

“I really love flowers, they’re so pretty don’t you think? These ones have a nice colour.”

“They’re alright.”

Will smiled and rolled his eyes. “Let me find something to put these in and then I’ll show you around campus!”

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“How do you not get lost?”

Will chuckled, “Well, sometimes I did, but my roommate offered to walk with me to my classes. Of course he’s not always on time... Usually if you ask someone for help they’re pretty nice about it.”

Mike couldn’t seem to take his eyes off Will, completely entranced.

Will was comfortable here. His shoulders weren’t so tense and he didn’t fold into himself. He was still a little jittery, something Mike

had come to associate the boy with. Even back in elementary school he was a jittery kid and Mike assumed that it would probably always be apart of him.

But he wasn't afraid to smile when he walked down the hall and now he didn't walk close by Mike's side because he was anxious and afraid, it was simply because he wanted to. Will would always be quiet, soft spoken, a little shy, but that's who he was. Innocent in a way Mike couldn't quite explain. Maybe his view was slightly jaded because a part of him would always hold onto the young five year old he'd met on the swings. He was still curious and found wonder in simple things like a few stupid flowers or the softness of the clouds during a sunset. Still sweet enough to rot your teeth with a mischievous streak that only his closest of friends got to see. Mike could tell a giant weight had been lifted off of Will's shoulder once he'd gotten out of Hawkins, left behind his bullies, the intensified homophobia, the upside down.

"And this is one of the pottery rooms, I don't have any pottery classes but Richie does and-"

"Who's Richie?"

"Oh! Richie is my roommate."

Mike watched closely as Will spoke.

"Roommate huh? Why so flustered?"



Will's face became a deeper shade of red and Mike was mixed between feeling jealous and drinking up the colour on Will's soft skin. "Well he can be a little... crude... sometimes. I just thought of something he said earlier about you coming over."

Mike frowned slightly,

"It's a little overwhelming sometimes, but he's nice!"

Mike chuckled as he imagined it. Will had always gotten flustered easily when it came to these sort of things and Mike wondered if this roommate even knew what Will's natural skin tone was.

"So Will," Mike threw an arm over Will's shoulders and raised an eyebrow, "What'd he say about me?" He teased.

Will's face was redder than Mike had ever seen it.

"Nothing! It was nothing!"

Mike burst with laughter, Will joining in after a moment, although softer, shyer.

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By the time the two were heading back to Will's dorm it was pitch black out, the only light coming from the small and dull lamp posts along the walkway. Will had significantly picked up his pace. Mike quickly caught onto Will's creeping anxiety and grabbed Will's hand. Will looked up at him with wide eyes, slightly frantic.

“It's okay. I'm here.”

Will slowed down and it only took him a few minutes to calm himself. Mike still held his hand the whole way and Will still squeezed it everytime he laughed.

Things were okay, Mike had worried for nothing. Things between them hadn't changed at all.

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When Mike woke up the next morning Will was awake and at his desk, using what looked to be watercolour paints. But Mike couldn't be sure.

“Will? What're you doing up?”

Will smiled and rolled his eyes, “Well it's already eleven am sleepyhead.”

Mike instantly shot up, “Eleven!? Will! You should have woken me

up! We only have today, tomorrow and half of Sunday!”

“I didn’t mind, it reminded me of our sleepovers.”

“Except Dustin and Lucas weren’t here.”

Will sighed wistfully, “I barely ever get to talk to Lucas.”

“Really? Lucas and Max call me all the time, I haven’t heard from Dustin since he left!”

“Dustin called me yesterday, he sounds pretty busy but he still calls me a few times in a week.”

*“What!?”*

The two continued to catch each other up on the other party members as they walked to the commons with a canteen.

Once they had gotten their food and sat down Mike began to pout.

“I can’t believe Dustin calls you all the time but not me.”

“Maybe he just doesn’t want your dad to pick up? They don’t really get along.”

“Or maybe he doesn’t wanna talk to me since I’m not at a cool university like you two.”

“Mike... that’s not true.”

“Besides, since when does my father pick up the phone? Or do anything helpful.” Mike grumbled.

Will gave him an empathetic smile “He still bothering you?”

*“All the time.”* Mike groaned.

“I’m sorry.”

“And he says the same thing everytime! He’s always like,” Mike furrowed his eyebrows and lowered his voice, pretending to chew loudly, “ *‘You kids nowadays are so privileged, back in my day we used to sleep out in fields and hide under cows when it rained. We worked hard all day, everyday, blah, blah I’m old. Video games are the reason there’s world hunger, you’re losing brain cells.’* ”

Will laughed and Mike grinned,

“His speeches are the only things making me lose brain cells.”

“That was a pretty good impression Mike, you even wear those sweaters like him... Are you gonna become your dad?”

Mike fake gagged, “Don’t even joke Will. I’m gonna have to burn all my clothes now!”

“Sorry.” Will said with a shrug.

“You dont sound very sorry.”

Will grinned, “You always see right through me.”

Will was close enough for Mike to admire his beauty marks and smell his comforting scent. See how his long eyelashes brushed his cheeks everytime he blinked.

Will didn’t seem to notice the close proximity and Mike used that as his excuse to pull away and clear his throat, rather than close the distance between them.

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“Jeez Will, you’re the slowest eater in the universe.”

“Am not! You just eat like it’s the first meal you’ve had in days!”

“Maybe it was.”

“It better not have been Michael.”

“Ooh pulling out the big guns.”

Will gave Mike a nervous and worried look.

“Will please, I ate yesterday.”

Will looked pleased by this and went back to his food, missing the incredibly fond smile Mike sent his way.

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“Get it! Get it!”

“I’m trying!” Mike shrieked.

Moments later the game over music sang out and Mike let his head drop onto the arcade game.

“Good try Mike, you almost beat the second place score!” Mike smiled from Wil’s praise but hid it in the crook of his elbow and sighed.

“Play again?”

Mike instantly perked up, “You bet!”

They stayed in the arcade playing games until dinner, just like when they were kids.

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“Mike? You still awake?” Will whispered.

Mike turned over in Will’s bed so that he was face to face with the smaller boy. “Yeah.”

“I can’t sleep.”

“Neither can I...” Mike murmured.

Will smiled slightly, “I think I’m too excited that you’re here with me.”

Mike grinned, “I’m really excited to be here. I missed having you around in Hawkins.”

“I’ve kinda missed Hawkins...”

“Really? I thought after everything you’d never wanna even think of that place again.”

Will hummed in agreement. It was quiet for a moment and if Mike couldn’t see Will’s warm hazel eyes.

“Will?”

“I guess it’s not Hawkins I miss. Just you.”

Mike’s breath caught in his throat and his heart hammered against his ribcage. If Will could hear it, he didn’t say anything. Mike rose a nervous hand, letting it fall into Will’s soft hair and began carding through it.

“Y-You should try to get some sleep. A tired Byers is not a happy Byers.”

“And a tired Wheeler is a sassy Wheeler. Well, sassier than usual, which is saying something.”

Mike gently tugged at Will’s hair, “Hey!”

Will giggled and Mike’s heart squeezed in protest.

“Good night Mike.”

“Night Will.”

Mike didn’t stop playing with his friend’s hair until his calm breathing lulled Mike to sleep

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“Hey Mike,”

“Yeah?”

“Could you look at this piece I have to hand in? I need you to be *honest*.”

“Will, you know I always love your art.”

“Then pretend Troy made it.” Will said with a small smile as he picked up his sketchbook, his thin wrists bending slightly at the weight of it at first.

“I doubt Troy could even pick up a pencil, let alone use it for art.”

“Miiike!”

“Okay, okay, show me. I promise I’ll be honest.”

“It’s for my landscaping class.”

“Is that what you were working on yesterday morning?”

Will blushed slightly. “That was... something else.”

Mike raised an eyebrow but Will shrugged him off, opening the sketchbook and placing it in Mike’s hands.

“It’s pastels, so careful not to smudge it.”

Mike took the painting and cradled it cautiously, he always appreciated that Will would show him his art. He cherished everything that Will created, it all held a dainty and soft beauty, like the boy that created them. Mike’s eyes swam over the glistening water of a river and the soft grassy hills. Every detail was carefully drawn out, some pieces of the work so small that Mike wasn’t sure how it was possible to create them. Mike pictured Will hunched over for hours carefully adding texture to the fur of a rabbit and carefully choosing where he would place highlights in the water, how to define each scale on a lizard’s back. It reminded Mike of a time when Will’s drawings were messy, erratic, when he was so desperate to explain how he was feeling, what he was seeing. He remembered when the mind flayer tried to ruin Will’s grace and beauty and his jaw unconsciously clenched at the memory. His Will, shaking and drenched in sweat, waking up gasping for breath after night terrors, voice turning rough and demonic, eyes dark and wild jerky movements. He remembered the smell of fear so suffocating in the hospital room, the way Will couldn’t meet his mother’s eyes for months after what had happened to Bob.

“Mike?”

Mike was brought back to the curtain at Will’s sweet voice, tinted with concern.

“It’s magnificent Will.” Mike said breathless.

Will flushed and gave Mike a tender smile. “Thanks...”

“Really, it is. Y’know, I still have every picture you’ve ever done for me or tried to throw away.”

“Oh my god,” Will muttered, he covered his face, an embarrassed grin on his face, “Please tell me you don’t really.”

“I do,” Mike said with a chuckle, moving closer to Will, “I have binders full of ‘em I look at them every time I’m missing you.”

“That’s so cheesy.”

Mike grinned, “It’s true!” He loved looking at them, seeing how Will had grown over the years always left Mike’s chest feeling lighter. Made him feel safer, when Will went missing he went to them for comfort, a reminder that Will was real and they helped give him the courage to keep searching when he was feeling weak. “No wonder you got into this school!”

Will’s face was bright red, he’d never been the best at taking compliments and Mike loved to shower him with them.

“You’re being dramatic, but thank you.”

“I really do love it. You better send it my way when your teachers done with it.”

“If you say so...”

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Before the two knew it Sunday had arrived and Mike was in his car, getting ready for the drive back to Hawkins.

“Bye Mike.”

“Bye Will...”

“I had a lot of fun this weekend.”

Mike smiled gently, “Me too.”

“This is for you...” Will whispered, holding out a small envelope. Mike took it hesitantly and flipped it over to open the unclosed flap in the back. “But don’t open it until you get home!”

“Okay...?”

“I-I don’t want to see your reaction.”

Mike laughed, "Sure thing Will."

"And make sure to call me when you get back! I'll worry if you dont."

"I would have called even if you hadn't asked, four hours without you is long enough for me."

Will blushed and grinned bashfully. "You better come back soon Wheeler."

"You know i'll be up here the second you ask."

"Drive safe!"

"I will."

~~~~~

When Mike got back he headed straight for the basement and dropped onto the couch in exhaustion. He was completely worn out now that his high from visiting Will was over.

"It must be this town..." Mike muttered to himself. Sighing, he shoved his hands into his pockets and felt the small envelope. Mike had momentarily forgotten about it and pulled it out of his pocket with a radiant smile.

He carefully opened it and pulled out a small piece of thick paper. On it were delicately painted Iris'

*'When did Will...'*

Mike's mind helpfully supplied the Friday morning when he'd awoken to Will painting and his grin grew even wider, cheeks aching slightly.

On the back in Will's neat scrawl it read;

*Mike and Iris' November.12 , 1989*

*Mike,*

*Thank you very much for the beautiful flowers, I really loved them! I'll think of you everytime I see them and I'll paint them whenever I am in a rut. I have greatly missed having you with me but your constant support and kindness has helped me gain the courage to stay here. Thank you for everything, you're the best friend anyone could ask for.*

*-Will :)*

Mike's heart was in his throat as he read the letter over and over again.

~~~~~

The next day Mike applied for a job at the flower shop.

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you for reading! I hope you all enjoyed!
Constructive criticism is always appreciated! If you
wanna kudos or comment that'd be nice to! I swear
I'm not mean! Hope everyone has a nice winter
break <3

-Mei

Shameless self-promoting:

Instagram: @Lonely_Ghoul

4. Cologne

Summary for the Chapter:

Mike remembering how he realized he fell in love with Will Byers

THIS CHAPTER IS BASICALLY ALL FLASHBACKS

Notes for the Chapter:

Me: Hey there's this thing you like to do and needs to get done we should do it.

My ADHD ass: HeY tHaT's P cOoL bUt WhY dOn'T wE sTaRt To Do PoInTlEsS tHiNgS yOu DoN't CaRe AbOuT fOr A mAx Of 5 MiNuTeS bEfOrE mOViNg On?!!!!!!? :DD

Me: But... why???

My ADHD ass: BeCaUsE I oWn YoU

Anyways, Sorry for the wait! Also I'm making Mike pansexual bc i can. *Banging hands on the table* pan Mike! pan Mike! pan Mike!

“I feel like I haven't seen you in ages!” Mike whined into the phone.

Will laughed softly, “I feel the same, but it’s really only been a week and a half”

“When is our next meetup?”

“Not for another two weeks.”

“God, I’m lucky El’s here or my brain would rot and turn to mush before then.”

“How is she doing?”

“She’s doing good, kickin’ ass, the usual.”

Will laughed and Mike could tell that Will had one of those small, fond smiles on his face. “That’s Eleven for ya”

“She told me to say hi to you when I last visited but I forgot”

Will laughed yet again and Mike was drowning in the saccharine tone filling his ear.

“Hey Mike, how’s it going with your parents?”

“They’ve gotten off my case since I got that job that the flower shop but they’re still annoying as all hell.”

Will sighed wistfully, “I wish I worked at a flower shop. I’m starting to hate the smell of fast foods...”

Mike chuckled, “Do you smell like hamburgers now?”

“I sure hope not! Do you smell like flowers?”

“Nah, guess my colognes too strong.”

Will hummed in acknowledgment, “Well it’s still a nice smell.”

Mike grinned, remembering when he and Lucas had first bought the cologne.

-

Mike sniffed the bottle and scrunched his nose up, “Girls like the smell of this stuff?”

“Of course they do Mike! Why else would all the seniors wear it?”

“It smells weird.”

“I agree, but what's important is that Max likes it, and... El...”

Mike frowned slightly, he and Eleven had broken up quite some time ago and it had been mutual. Yet their friend group was always cautious whenever they brought up the whole thing.

Mike simply shrugged, he wasn’t really trying to impress the girl anymore. There was a time where that was what he would have wanted but the puppy love had melted away and they had both quickly realized their

feelings for one another were platonic.

Lucas may have had someone in mind he was hoping to impress but at this point Mike was just hoping to impress anyone.

The next day the two had made it to school feeling quite proud of themselves and ‘totally tubular’ as Lucas had joked. After All, they were wearing cologne, just like the seniors did.

It was a complete bust for Lucas, Max having faked gagged and muttering “You smell like my brother” before moving closer towards Dustin.

Nobody had commented on Mike’s cologne, that is, until Will arrived. He walked up to the group with a smile, taking his spot next to Mike.

“Hi guys!”

When Mike had turned to look at him Will’s eyes had widened slightly in curiosity and he took a step closer to Mike.

“Are you... wearing cologne?”

Mike gulped and nodded, Will’s close proximity had made Mike’s hands start to get clammy and he brushed off as nerves from seeing Max’s poor reaction to the new scent.

Will looked up at Mike, their height difference much more obvious from this close, and gave Mike a small smile; "I like it."

"T-Thanks..." Mike croaked, his stomach in knots. Probably because it always pleased him to receive compliments from his friend.

Will simply nodded before starting up a conversation with Dustin about the newest comic they were reading, Mike's throat was too dry to be able to add any of his own comments and practically ran to class once the bell had rung.

Will had stayed impossibly close to Mike for the whole day, not giving Mike's poor fluttery heart a moment to rest from the thumping speed like a rabbits that he got whenever their arms brushed or knuckles knocked.

The next morning Mike walked past the bottle sitting on his desk many times, eyeing it cautiously, as if it was the reason he suddenly was feeling lightheaded and not because of his incredibly sweet friend.

"I like it" Will's soft tone rang through Mike's head all morning until he finally gave in. Groaning and slamming down his cereal spoon, making him get an odd look from Nancey as he stormed upstairs and sprayed himself with the cologne. If he had a small smile on his face as he thought of Will standing closer to him, well, nobody needed to know.

When Lucas and Mike had began their bike ride to school Lucas had obviously noticed and called Mike out on it.

“Your wearing it again?”

“So?” Mike said slightly defensive.

“It didn’t impress El.”

“I’m not trying to impress El! I don’t want to go out with her again!”

“Well nobody liked it!” Lucas snarked, still slightly bitter over the response he got from Max. He never wanted to be compared to her brother. Ever.

Mike simply looked ahead of him and away from Lucas instead of answering. Lucas gave him a puzzled look before his eyes lit up with an understanding and amused look.

“Nobody liked it... except Will.”

“Yeah? And?” Mike sassed, the back of his neck feeling warmer than before.

“You’re wearing it for Will?”

Mike’s face went red, “What?! No! That’s so stupid! Why would I do that!?” Mike spat.

Lucas gave Mike a look but seemed to understand that this was a sensitive topic for Mike; and tried to think through his words before saying anything.

“Look, Mike, If you like Will that’s-”

“I don’t!!”

Lucas raised and eyebrow at Mike’s attitude.

“ I like this cologne!” Lie. “And besides, I spent my allowance on it, I dont wanna waste it!” Technically Nancy’s allowance. “It’s not for Will, god Lucas!”

Lucas rolled his eyes but dropped it, “Whatever Mike.”

And sure, a jolt of electricity shot through Mike when Will stood closer so he could smell it, and a shiver raced down Mike’s spine whenever they brushed together. His smiles got large and dopey when Dustin would tease him for the scent and Will would once again claim to like it.

But that wasn’t because he liked Will. Absolutely not, Will was a guy . Mike didn’t have anything against gay people, in fact the party had often discussed their suspicions of Will himself being gay (When said boy wasn’t around). It didn’t bother any of them, Mike just wasn’t gay. Afterall, he had liked Eleven, that was clear to everyone. He just liked his best friend’s

attention, he always had. Especially once Will had gotten back from the upside down. So it wasn't weird when he ran out of cologne that he went to pick another bottle... or two.

And it wasn't weird when Will came out to him as gay later that year and his heart was about ready to explode. Hope bubbling up into his throat and choking him. It was totally normal that his whole body felt warm when Will had whispered,

"But you can't tell anyone, you're the only one I've told."

There was nothing wrong with the overflowing fondness and intensified protective streak he had for the smaller boy.

-

And Mike continued to believe that until the beginning of grade eleven, when he saw a girl giving Will a flirty smile. At this point Will had come out to the party members, Steve, Joyce and Jonathan. Will was still a little shy about it but had grown far more comfortable with himself and often cracked jokes about it with Dustin, who knew the most about the lgbt community. Mainly because he spent a ridiculous amount of time scouring the library for any books he could read up about it and his natural way with making others feel comfortable.

Mike had been turning the corner to grab Will from his locker, the party was planning to go the arcade later. That's when he saw it, a girl from their shared biology class leaning against the lockers and twirling her a piece of long dark hair around her finger as she asked,

“Can I look at your sketchbook Will? I’ve heard amazing things!”

Mike bit his tongue, blood boiling and fists clenching as Will gave her a shy smile and handed over the book, far too polite to say no

The girl took it and began to gently flip through the pages a bright smile on her face. “Wow Will! These are amazing! Do you think... you could draw me sometime?” The girl batted her eyelashes and Will’s face was slightly pink with embarrassment.

“U-Um... maybe...”

“Thanks! You’re so sweet Will!” She gave Will a wink and at this point his face was beet red, Will always got flustered easily.

Mike wanted to storm over and grab Will, pull him close and out of sight of the girl, tell her to back off, say ‘Will’s mine. ’

Mike froze at that thought. ‘Mine...?’

The girls loud laugh snapped him out of his thoughts.

“I’m going over there.” Mike growled.

Lucas grabbed his arm to stop him and Dustin spoke, “Just leave it Mike.

He doesn't want us babying him remember? Just let him do his thing. We'll only go over if we need to."

"Well I need to." Mike spat.

Max scoffed, "God you are so jealous."

"I am not. "

Everyone shared a look as if they knew something Mike didn't.

"Y'know... my friends Mark and Airin are going out tonight. They invited me for a double date if you wanna go." The girl said with a friendly smile.

"Umm... a d-date?" Will's face was paler than usual, the panic on his face clear.

Lucas let go of Mike's arm and Dustin shrieked "Okay go! Go! Save our cleric! Go loverboy go!"

Mike was already moving the moment Lucas' hand had been removed and he would have sent Dustin a look if he wasn't so desperate to get to Will.

"I-I'm sorry but..."

“What?” The girl asked, face falling, “Is there something wrong with me?”

“N-No!”

Mike was nearly running down the hall.

“Then what-”

“I’m gay!”

Mike froze for a moment.

“What?”

Mike quickly started moving again, muttering “Crap, crap, crap” under his breath as he went.

“I’m really sorry.” Will said, looking down at the ground.

The girl was about to say something else when Mike came barreling in. The girl shrieked and Will jumped in surprise.

“Hey Will, buddy, how’s it going? Got all your stuff?”

“Uh- I-”

“Let’s see, missing a sketchbook? Oh there it is!” Mike said quickly, his annoyance clear as he snatched the precious book back from the girl, still trying his best to be careful with it even with his growing frustration.

She looked shocked and Will was a stuttering mess.

“Here, let me get those,” Mike rushed out, taking the rest of Will’s books from him and closing his locker quickly.

“M-Mike-”

Mike threw an arm over Will’s shoulder and pulled him close.

“Well, we better get going.” Mike’s glared pierced the girl and left her shocked. “Bye.”

“Sorry Jess...” Will murmured before Mike pulled him off. His stomach twisting at the fact that Will knew her name.

As they hurried down the hall Mike heard her faintly call out “It’s okay Will! My Aunt is like that, I won’t tell anyone!” It left Mike a little comforted but the annoyance radiating off of him hadn’t left yet. Instead of stopping when they reached the party Mike kept going, the desire to have Will all to himself, to protect him bubbling over and becoming a

giant mess.

They were almost at the AV Room when Will spoke.

“M-Mike could you slow down a little?”

Mike instantly slowed, loosening the grip on Will’s shoulder. “Sorry... did I hurt you?”

“No, I’m okay. You’re just kind of worrying me... what’s going on?”

Mike looked away from Will guiltily, what was going on?

“I’ll tell you when we get to the AV room.”

Will didn’t push it and Mike was grateful. But when they arrived Mike’s throat began to close up at the worried and curious look on Will’s face. Mike made sure to lock the door behind them.

Mike took a deep breath and turned towards Will, his voice strained, “Look- I’m sorry, I just-” Mike sighed exasperatedly at not being able to articulate what it was he wanted to say. It was much easier when he was writing a campaign.

“Mike, I know you feel like you need to protect me, but you don’t. I can

handle things myself."

Mike put down Will's book and ran his hands through his curly hair. "I know. I know Will, I do. It's just-" Mike was beyond frustrated with himself at this point. He couldn't even understand his own actions, how did he expect Will to?

But because Will was the perfect human being he was he seemed to, "I think maybe... you're not to sure what happened..." Will said softly, Mike looked up at Will with wide eyes and Will gave him a small smile. "Sometimes we dont have everything figured out." Will was trying to be comforting and if the situation was any different it would have worked wonders on Mike's tense shoulders and clammy hands, but it just made Mike's stomach churn even more and made his pounding heart speed up to the point of worry. "It's alright Mike."

"No. Its not." Mike said suddenly. It wasn't right, the way he coddled Will. The way his heart would knock against his rib cage after every smile sent his way, the jealousy, because Mike could only deny that that's what this was for so long. The extreme desire he had to protect Will that he felt with every fibre of his being. It wasn't right. It wasn't normal. After a moment of tense silence Mike shook his head. "The uh- The party's probably waiting for you."

Will's brows knit together in confusion. "Mike what's going on?"

"Nothing I'm just busy today."

"Why are you lyi-"

"I'll see you tomorrow Will. Sorry again."

Mike felt horrible leaving Will like that but he needed to get out, he needed to calm down and breath. He couldn't look into Will's large, kind, hazel eyes any longer. But most of all Mike needed to sort himself and his feelings out. Something he truly hated to do. But this wasn't fair to Will, so he trekked home, head down low as he tried to think through everything. Deep down he knew, he knew exactly what was going on but he kept pushing it away. Once Mike had made it to the wall he'd built up around the whole idea of possibly liking Will he shook his and began to chip away at it. "For Will's sake..."

Mike laid in his bed, staring at the ceiling, completely silent. Mike had come to terms with things, sort of. He knew what he was feeling. It was similar to what he had felt for El all those years ago. But with El, that was comfortable, that was safe, it was normal.

This thing, for Will, was way out of his comfort zone.

Will was a guy and his best friend. It was different, it was strange and Mike wasn't sure what to do.

He had a crush on his best friend and it was weird.

Except it wasn't. When Mike had gotten to school the next morning he gave Will a small smile and a wave. He had received a stunning and kind one in return. All the worry and the discomfort had completely swept out of him. Because it was Will Byers, he felt comforted, and loved and so

happy around.

It wasn't weird when Will's hand would gently grab his fingers when he got nervous or when they naturally gravitated towards one another. It felt good, and Mike knew that there was nothing weird about it. Nothing at all.

-

Mike's first thoughts on who to tell about his new discovered sexuality crisis was the Byers boy himself. Clearly he would have gone through it himself, and plus they always went to each other. It was an unspoken law. However he didn't want to get Will suspicious and so his next idea had been Lucas. He was close with Lucas and there was the convenience of Lucas having already guessed it all that time ago. But Lucas was just as clueless as he was when it came to these sort of things and really he wouldn't have any knowledge Mik

e himself didn't already have. Which is how he ended up on Dustin's doorstep.

"Dusty your friends here!" Dustin had darted to the door shortly after his mother had called and he sent Mike a bright smile.

"Hey Mike! I swear I'll get that Spiderman comic back to you asap!!"

"What spiderman comic?"

Dustin sent him a cheeky grin, "So why don't you tell me why you're here before I put myself on any other baggage I've got." Dustin joked, leaning against his desk in an attempt to look cooler which ended in him stumbling slightly and knocking all his papers and books off of it. It made Mike snort and he relaxed a little bit from the friendly and playful vibes that filled the room.

"Dustin, do you know anything about being... gay?"

"Oh sure! I know tons of stuff! I mean, not personally but I've got tons of knowledge up here" Dustin said with a grin as he tapped the side of his head. "That lady couldn't take my paddles even if she tried."

Mike frowned slightly in confusion. "What?"

"Nothing, nothing. What do ya wanna know Mike?"

"I was just wondering, can you like both girls and guys...?"

"Is this about that girl Will was talking to the other day? Because he said he's gay, like full-time."

"I-" Mike fell quiet, he didn't think it would be this hard to spit out a few words, especially since he already knew about the support he'd get from his friends. Yet he was scared anyways.

The lack of Mike's response had Dustin giving him his inquisitive gaze and

it didn't take long before Dustin's mouth opened a quiet "Oh" coming out of it.

Dustin came and sat next to Mike and placed a friendly arm on his shoulder.

"Sure buddy, there's like a whole spectrum of stuff. Some of the more common ones are... oh shoot, what were they called again? I know I read about them in that book. Oh! Bisexual and pansexual, there's other ones as well of course but those would be closest related to what you're specifically talking about, but there's also-

"Dustin! Slow down! I can't keep up with what you're saying! What do those things even mean?!" Mike snapped, overwhelmed.

"Okay well Bisexual is when you like to different genders, for example guys and girls, but it can be other genders too like- okay actually you know what, you look like your brain is gonna explode so let's just skip over the different genders for now." Dustin said after seeing the frantic look on Mike's face.

"I'll simplify this for ya. Bisexual; guys and girls are both your cup of tea."

Mike nodded and Dustin grinned at him.

"Pansexual, literally anyone is your cup of tea. You care about their personality rather than their gender."

"Are they the same?" Mike asked slightly confused.

"No, no see this is where the gender thing comes in. because some people don't identify as a guy or a girl." Dustin explained, his hands waving as he did.

Mike nodded, trying his best to retain all the information Dustin was giving him. It wasn't that Mike had never been curious to learn about these sort of things in the past it just wasn't something people ever really talked about, it was taboo. Especially in his conservative household. Mike could imagine his father having an aneurysm if someone even said the word gay under their house's roof, let alone started talking about things with some depth.

"Okay... so what- what there's three genders?"

"Don't necessarily think of things as numbers. Think of things as like... a colour spectrum. Remember when we learned about colour spectrums in art. And there was blue but before it got to green there were a ton of other shades of blue that weren't technically blue?"

"So basically whatever you feel. You feel and it's a thing."

"Exactly, people love to put labels on things but you can't possibly label everything."

Mike nodded to himself and smiled slightly. "Right. You can't label everything."

"There ya go! So... Will?"

“Yeah, Will.”

“Dustin snickered, “It’s about time you realized it! We all already knew!”

Mike’s face paled, “Will knows?!”

“No not Will, he’s too innocent to notice when you’re eyeing him up.”

Mike lightly shoved his friend. “I do not eye up Will!”

“I’m kidding, I’m kidding, but seriously dude, you’ve got some electricity going on. If I were you I’d make a move.”

“Thanks Dustin.”

“You got it. Wait till I tell Lucas and Max about this.”

Mike groaned and flopped back on Dustin’s bed, but he couldn’t hide the grin that had made its way onto his face.

“Mike?? Miiikkkeee? Are you still there??”

“Tally ho my good fellow! Hang up the phone if the bastards keepin ya waitin! I'm starvin!”

Mike made a face at the second voice he could hear coming over the phone.

“Richie shush, Hello?”

“Sorry, sorry I got lost in thought!”

Will giggled and Mike grinned. “Usually I’m the one daydreaming.”

Mike was about to say something when he heard a muffled shriek and “Really!? Pillows at me! You’re lucky I like ‘em fiery Byers!”

“Oh my god...” Will muttered into the phone. Mike laughed softly at the exhausted tone in Will’s voice. “Richie please, I’m on the phone.”

After that things quieted down and Will sighed, “Sorry Mike, what were you saying.”

“Hey! Hey! Hey! you didn’t tell me that it was Mikey!! You're one and only beloved-”

“Mike I gotta go!” Will said, voice shrill.

Mike laughed louder this time. “Call me back later Will.”

“With the way you go on about him I’m guess his wang-”

“I w- Richie stop!”

With that the phone had been hung up and Mike couldn’t erase the smile off of his face, that is until he saw the clock. He’d been on the phone much longer than he expected. “Shit. El’s gonna kill me.” Mike grumbled to himself as he rushed to throw on a coat and ran out the door. All the while thinking of just how lucky he was to have his friends.

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm making Mike pansexual bc I can. *Banging hands on the table* pan Mike! pan Mike! pan Mike!

Thank you for reading! I really appreciate it! Comments and Kudos are always appreciated. Hope you all have a lovely day!

Sidenote: It was Jaeden's birthday a couple days ago, my baby is growing up *Sobs happily* So proud of him~

Shamless selfpromoting:
Instagram: @Lonely_Ghoul
Tumblr: strawberrystan

5. Yoda Impressions

Summary for the Chapter:

"Did he say anything to you?" Joyce asked

Mike shook his head, "Not a word."

Joyce sighed. "That boy..."

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm so sorry that this took o long! I've been really busy with school as of late. Anyways, I hope you enjoy and I would appreciate pointing out any grammar/spelling mistakes because I'm a mess. But at least my exams are all done with :D

"Does that make sense now?" Mike asked.

Eleven stared at the question, "I... think so..."

Mike gave her a patient smile. "It's alright if you don't, I can explain it again."

Eleven shook her head, "No. I can do it."

Once again the question was incorrect and Eleven sighed in frustration.

“Hey,” Mike said softly, placing a gentle hand on Eleven’s back. “It’s alright, This stuff is really difficult.”

Hopper nodded in agreement from the counter. “He’s right kid. If it was easy I could help you but hell if I know this calculus shit.”

“You’ve already shown me *twice*.”

“Then I’ll show a different way. Just because it made sense for me doesn’t mean it will for you, everyone learns differently El. We just need to find the best way for *you*.”

Eleven glared down at her worksheet with angry tears in her eyes.

“Besides,” Mike spoke softly, “You had to learn a ton of stuff in less than half the time we’re given to learn it. You’re being way too hard on yourself. Grade ten is a tough year since they introduce a bunch of new material.”

Eleven looked up at Mike and nodded, smiling slightly. “Okay, Thanks Mike.”

“No problem El,” Mike returned her smile before picking up his pencil once again. “Now, let me show you an alternative method.”

It didn't take long until Eleven had it down.

~ ~ ~

Mike sighed as he leaned over the counter, resting his elbows on it. It had been a slow afternoon, only one older man coming in to pick up flowers for a woman he'd met and was trying to impress. Mike couldn't help but give the man a fond smile. He seemed so excited and hopeful, it was nice. Mike had helped him pick out a bouquet still needing to use the staff book that explained the meaning of different flowers. There were far too many for him to remember and he found a new level of respect for his coworker who knew them all by heart.

Usually, Mike didn't mind slow days. However today he'd forgotten his DM notebook and DM guide so he couldn't work on any campaigns and had already read all the comics he had in his shelf.

Luckily someone entered as if his boredom was so powerful it was drawing people in who had pity for him. Mike instantly perked up and his eyes widened in surprise when none other than Joyce walked in. He wondered if the whole reason the Byers family had been created was to brighten up Mike's life.

"Hello Miss. Byers."

Joyce sent Mike a warm smile. "I didn't know you worked here Mike."

"I've only been here a bit over a month. Something in particular you're looking for?"

"Will's been going on and on about some flowers, oh shoot, just wait... I wrote down the name somewhere..." Joyce muttered as she pulled crumpled papers and receipts out of her pocket.

"Iris' maybe?" Mike asked with a knowing smile.

Joyce snapped her fingers and smiled, "That's it! I'm going out tomorrow to see him for the day. He's real sick."

"What?"

"Didn't tell you either hm?"

"Not a word."

Joyce ran her hands through her hair exasperatedly. "That boy... I only found out because he had a nasty coughing fit when he called the other day." Joyce's hands were shaky and her index finger twitched slightly, telling Mike she was craving a cigarette. "I know that it's probably nothing, but part of me will always worry that..."

"I know what you mean." Mike said sadly.

“If he tells you anything, let me know alright Mike?”

“Got it.”

Joyce gave Mike another smile, this one sadder and tired. “He really trusts you Mike. Thank you for being there for him.”

“He’s really trusts you too Miss. Byers.”

“I know, I know, but it’s different. With you being his- his... friend.”

Mike gave Joyce a slightly confused look as she quickly looked away, slightly guilty.

“Right... well, I’m just glad he trusts me as much as I trust him.”

Joyce’s smile was small but there. Mike grabbed the flowers and handed them to Joyce, plugging in his workers discount. Joyce gave him a grateful look before leaving, the flower shop once again dull. Mike didn’t notice it much, a dopey grin on his face as he floated through the rest of his shift. Joyce’s words running through his head like a broken record;

‘Will’s been going on and on about some flower.’

Only a few days until he’d get to see his best friend again.

“Mike... don’t get me wrong. I *love* the flowers but you don’t need to bring them *everytime* I see you. These... These gotta be expensive, especially this time of year now that it’s getting cold.”

Mike waved his hand, brushing Will off. “I get a discount. Besides I don’t have any taxes or anything to be paying. I’ve got a couple bucks to spare.”

Will sighed exasperated but fond, “Well at least tell me what they are.”

“They’re Amaryllis’ Do you like them?”

Red Amaryllis representing unrequited/required love, beauty and splendor.

“They’re beautiful Mike. As always. You really have an eye for these sorts of things.”

“You think all flowers are beautiful Will.”

“Mm that’s true.” Will hummed in agreement, turning and walking

into the dorm, “They must be extra pretty because you brought them.”

Mike wheezed at the casualness in Will’s voice as if he hadn’t just sent Mike to an early grave. Who just spills things like that without a second thought?? Mike leaned against the door frame attempting to catch his breath before the soft haired boy turned around and saw the pansexual mess that was Michael Wheeler. However the boy was quick and when he saw Mike still at the door he gave him a dazzling smile, eyes shimmering with affection.

“Come on, come on, I wanna hear about your new ideas for another campaign.”

Mike gave Will a goofy smile and strode into the room his heart liquify at Will’s sweet voice.

“Coming!”

~~~

“So I was thinking I could add a Beholder, or maybe two! Dustin would *freak out*. He hates them for some reason.”

Will nodded as Mike continued to enthusiastically talk about his plans for the campaign that he was currently putting together.

“Plus I don’t use Beholders very often so those guys probably wouldn’t have picked weapons that would cause the most damage.”

“Lucas might.” Will supplied and Mike nodded eagerly, quickly jotting it down in his notebook.

“Right, right, Lucas always seems to be one step ahead of the game.”

Will gave Mike a fond smile resting his chin in his hand as he listened to Mike continue to ramble.

“I was thinking of making three separate towns, a couple of forests and somewhere with lots of caves or creatures to lurk in. Or what about a displacer beast? Those can be really difficult to kill and I already have a drawing of one you did when we were sixteen so it would be one less piece you’d have to do. Especially since I’m gonna throw in some things we don’t need so that you don’t know exactly what will be in either. And I’m gonna make the critical failures hilarious, Dustin thinks he’s the funniest DM well we’ll see after this campaign. Also how would you feel about drawing Troy and his crew as ugly pirates? That way there’ll be double the satisfaction if you can beat them.”

“We’ll see Mike, after all I’ve got a lot of actual art assignments to do.” Will argued even though he knew damn well that he’d do every little thing Mike asked him to.

“Oh yeah, no problem. Just let me know.”

Will smiled was filled with adoration as he looked at his friend, but it went unnoticed as Mike continued to excitedly explain a new

character he was thinking of adding.

And this is usually how their conversations would go when Mike really got into it, rambling on so quickly that he was near incoherent. Will probably wouldn't have a clue what Mike was saying if he didn't have so much experience with Mike's DM ranting. Every once in awhile nodding his head excitedly or gasping, saying something along the lines of "No ways!" Or "What happens next?" And these small reactions, the encouragement was enough to keep Mike going. His heartbeat racing with excitement and only stopping for breaths when he was going to pass out. Even with the other party members Mike felt a little self-conscious talking about his campaigns like this. Working through them out loud. He wanted to keep his title as the best Dungeon Master. He often thought it was his *thing*. Dustin was the funny one, Lucas the sensible one, Will the creative one, Eleven the brave, Max the tough. So Mike held onto being the Dungeon Master for dear life. He'd once confessed this to Will. Will had seemed shocked, softly saying,

"What are you talking about? You're our leader! You keep this group together, you're the glue. We'd be so lost without you Mike. You're so kind and you're always looking out for all of us. I don't know if it's weird for me to say this, being y'know gay and everything... but- I'd say you're also the handsome one" Mike was red to the tips of his ears but he couldn't help the boyish grin that took over his face at Will's comment. Muttering a happy but embarrassed "Shut it Byers."

"And maybe I could add this extra dungeon that's just full of riddles but once you solve them all there's nothing. Man, Dustin would actually starting crying."

Will always got a little heart eyed when Mike talked about his campaigns, Mike's excitement was contagious and the sheer happiness Mike got from the idea of doing something for his friends



made Will's heart warm.

"Oh wow! It totally would!"

Mike sent Will a bright smile and continued to blabber on, "Right! That'll wipe that pompous grin off his cittern playing ass!" Will getting comfortable, relaxing to the sound of Mike's voice. In Will's opinion this was the best way you could possibly spend an afternoon. The only thing that could make it better... Will looked up at Mike and slowly reached out for Mike's hand. Gently wrapping his pinkie around Mike's. Without pausing in his speech Mike intertwined their fingers, his palm warm and rough against Will's. Now *this* was the best way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

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"M-Mike I can't- can't b-breath-"

"Mike is not me, Yoda is I." Mike said in his best (which wasn't saying much) Yoda impression.

Will gasped between the storms of laughter that had taken over him and Mike's grin was so wide he looked like the cheshire cat.

"Mike please-"

“Patience you must have young Padawan.”

Mike-: Will’s laughter interrupted him yet again. “Y-You’re ridiculous.”

“Truly wonderful the mind of a child is.”

“St-Stop!”

“You think Yoda stops teaching, just because his student does not want to hear? A teacher Yoda is.”

Will pounced at Mike, managing to get him to tumble back on Will’s. It wasn’t that Will used much strength, he simply caught Mike off guard. Mike had instantly fallen quiet after seeing Will, who was sat in Mike’s stomach, hunched over and holding his sides. His bright laughter singing out, eyes scrunched up by the power of the music erupting from his lips.

Once Will managed to calm down he opened his eyes, sparkling, and grinned down at Mike his cheeks flushed with happiness.

“Sorry, It was just so silly I couldn’t stop laughing. I thought I might die if I didn’t get a full breath.”

“Happens to every guy sometimes this does.” Mike said in his Yoda voice once again.

Will gently placed his hand over Mike’s mouth, whining at the curly haired boy. “Mike!”

Mike grinned under his hand and Will could feel the way Mike’s lips turned up against the palm of his hand. Mike raised his hands in surrender and Will gave him a teasingly smug smile, pulling his hand away.

“I guess you’ve learnt your lesson.” Will stated, a fake seriousness in his tone. The voice reminded him of their unnecessarily strict calculus teacher last year.

“Oh definitely, don’t mess with Will Byers. He’ll kill you with kindness!”

Will laughed again and Mike was star struck. Had Will always been this pretty? And why had it taken Mike so long to realize it?

“Oh sorry! I must be heavy! I’ll get off.”

“You’re like a couple of grapes.”

“Like I said I must be heavy to you, I’m so sorry. If I had realized I weighed that much”

Mike lightly shoved Will who simply slid off of Mike and laid next to him. A playful tilt to his lips. Mike loved when Will got a bit of an attitude, it was something only himself and Jonathan were well acquainted with and it often reminded Mike of just how close they were.

Mike and Will had simply been looking at one another for the past few minutes, eyes soft.

Mike broke the silence, his voice a soft whisper, the room's atmosphere making him feel like speaking too loudly would shatter it. Break it into a trillion little pieces, Mike wasn't quite sure what was drowning the room with the feeling but it was deep in his gut and his heart was banging as if ordering him not to wreck it. "I'm really glad I'm here..."

Will's breathed in sharply and they were close enough that Mike could hear it. "I'm really glad you're here too Mike..."

"I just... Hawkins is really suffocating lately."

Will shuffled closer his eyes inquiring, "Why?"

"I don't know..." Mike said with a sigh "The close mindedness, the fact that the party's not all together anymore, my parents."

Will didn't say anything but Mike knew he was listening, could feel the way his hazel eyes pierced right through Mike's own chocolate brown ones and deep into his mind. He must have known there was more and so Mike continued. "I feel like I'm never gonna escape it. I'll just grow up to be another nobody and be trapped in that stupid town in my parents stupid basement for the rest of my life."

"Mike, that's not true at all. You're amazing, and I know you're gonna get out of Hawkins. You deserve so much better than that. There's nothing wrong with taking a gap year if you don't know what you want to do."

"I'm scared it won't just be a gap year.... Im scared it will last forever."

Will placed his hand on Mike's, and it reminded Mike of the time he'd done the same for Will when he was dealing with the mindflayer.

"It wont. I won't let it. I promise."

As the conversation had continued their voices had gotten even softer and when Mike next spoke it was so quiet you wouldn't be able to hear it if you were more than a couple inches away.

"Thanks Will...."

"Of course."

The two continued to watch one another and without thinking Mike began to lean in, he wasn't sure if it was wishful thinking or not but he thought he saw Will's eyes drop down to his lips for a moment before meeting his eyes again. Mike placed a careful hand on Will's upper arm, murmuring his name to which Will said his back. The tension left between the small space between was so thick Mike thought he could choke on it. Their foreheads brushed together and Mike took a shaky breath, gathering the courage to say what he'd wanted to tell Will since grade eleven. "Will, I—"

The phone went off, blaringly loud compared to the near silent environment they'd been in and it caused both boys to jump. Just like that the moment was gone and Will was sitting up, sending Mike a small, apologetic smile as he got up to answer the phone. Mike sat up, his hands resting on the bed behind him to help with his spinning head. Mike's eyes never left Will as he walked his face hot and annoyance bubbling.

"Hello?" Will's eyes instantly brightened and he mouthed to Mike 'It's Dustin' before turning towards the phone a giant grin on his face. Mike's eyes were glued to the pink creeping up the back of Will's neck and he thought he would have hung up the phone, grabbed Will, catching his lips with his own if Will hadn't looked so thoroughly pleased by the fact that Dustin had called.

"I'm doing great! Mike's here right now. Say hi Mike!"

Mike waved and then mentally face palmed at his own stupidity. Will snickered. "He waved. How are your classes going."

Mike could faintly hear Dustin's boisterous voice but no clear words and Will beckoned Mike over delightedly and Mike managed to drag

himself off of Will's bed and over to the phone. If it was anyone but Will Mike would have stayed put and continued to pout, well he probably would have gotten up for Eleven too. Mike leaned close to the phone and hearing Dustin's cheery voice again after such a long time filled Mike's chest with love, his sour mood forgotten.

"It's been one hell of a ride Will, that's all I can say. The amount of work I have... I can't remember the last time i got a good seven hours of sleep."

"Sounds like you've been busy."

"Understatement of the year man."

"Hey! You should come to Hawkins!"

"What?" Both Dustin and Mike said at the same time.

"Dustin needs a break, you need to see the party again... we should do a weekend campaign!" Will's smile grew and grew the more he thought about his plan. "Mike that would be so perfect! You've been coming up with all sorts of great ideas for a campaign!"

"Lucas has been teaching Max how to play..." Mike added his grin slowly growing.

"Clearly we're all dying for another one of Michael Wheeler's

legendary campaigns! I'll see when I have a long weekend!" Dustin exclaimed excitedly. On the other end of the line there was rustling and then a loud "a hah! I've got a break in three weeks! I can just pick up some extra shifts and get a bus down to Hawkins!"

"When I get back I'll call Lucas and Max and see if that works for them too, then I'll let Will know and he'll tell you."

"Got it!" Dustin said happily. "I wasn't gonna call today but I'm so glad I did." Get back to me asap guys!"

"Will do!"

Once Dustin hung up Mike and Will grinned at each other. "Guess I better get drawing hey Mike?"

Mike blushed slightly at Will's cheerful smile and rushed to his notebook. "I'll make you a list of things to draw."

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When Mike got home he called Lucas and Max and they were both in. Max claiming to have made her character and ready to destroy the boys. Lucas complained that they're actually all supposed to be on the same team and Mike laughed at their bickering. In three weeks Hawkins wouldn't be so unbearable.



## **Notes for the Chapter:**

Thanks for reading! Sorry for the cliché phone call interruption but what can I say, I'm basic lol  
Kudos and comments are always appreciated! Have a great day <3

Shameless selfpromoting:  
tumblr; Strawberrystan  
instagram: @Lonely\_Ghoul

## **Author's Note:**

Thank you for reading! Constructive criticism is always appreciated, tell me what you're thinking so far! I like to know;) If you'd like to leave a kudos it would be appreciated! Hopefully you'll stick around for more chapters;) Have a nice day!!